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DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force

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European Views on the Use of Force in Bosnia and Hercegovina

Summary

While some European governments are urging the use of force to halt the fighting in Bosnia and Hercegovina, most will remain reluctant to commit forces to actions other than narrowly targeted relief missions because of political constraints and the operational difficulties of a large-scale military intervention. We believe most West European governments would oppose commitment of ground forces to separate warring factions or to impose a military settlement. Most also see limited utility and severe drawbacks to the use of punitive airstrikes as a means of resolving the conflict. Key West European countries probably would reluctantly agree to participate in limited actions such as arming relief convoys and monitoring heavy weapons if the operations are mandated by the UN.

This memorandum was prepared by assigned to the Balkan Task Force and Office of European Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, on

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Limited Support for Separating Warring Factions

Media coverage of civilian casualties and allegations of concentration camps are fueling domestic pressures on European governments to "do something" in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey, in particular, have strongly advocated that the West Europeans, NATO, and the UN use military force in Bosnia to expedite aid deliveries and to impose a settlement on the warring parties.

- Ankara, under domestic pressure to aid Bosnian Muslims, believes a UN threat to use force in Bosnia is necessary to get Serbia to negotiate. [redacted] the Turkish General Staff is planning for the possible deployment of a reinforced battalion to Bosnia if the UN Security Council decides to intervene.
- Budapest and Sofia probably would consider providing overflight rights or possibly even logistic support bases for UN-mandated operations. However, they almost certainly would not contribute combat troops or equipment to such an effort. Budapest is concerned about Serbian reprisals against the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina; Sofia argues that other Balkan countries should not be involved because of historical "paranoia" among states in the region. [redacted]

We believe that most West European governments will reject the the insertion of ground forces for the purpose of separating warring factions or imposing a military settlement of the conflict. They have few illusions about the likely difficulties involved in even limited missions. Western military planners frequently compare the Bosnian conflict to Vietnam and Lebanon, citing the difficult terrain, indiscernible battle lines, and lack of an identifiable enemy as compelling reasons not to mount significant military operations there. A leading European think-tank estimated 75,000 troops and constant air cover would be required merely to clear and protect a relief corridor to Sarajevo.

- The UK appears to be the most leery among West Europeans of any military involvement in Bosnia. Senior British officials cite the extreme risk to civilians if outside military forces intervene. London almost certainly wants to avoid military action that might jeopardize the international peace conference in London later this month.
- French military officials believe ground operations against Serbia would not resolve the crisis. Paris also is concerned that greater European military involvement in Bosnia could jeopardize the safety of UNPROFOR and the French forces that are its largest national military component.
- Bonn and Rome are reluctant to participate on the ground in Yugoslavia because of their involvement in the Balkans in WWII. German Foreign Minister Kinkel has said that German troops would not join military efforts in Bosnia and Hercegovina because of historical and constitutional constraints. [redacted]

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Reserved Attitudes Toward Airstrikes

Most European governments are also reluctant to support strategic airstrikes as a means of changing the combatants' behavior and do not believe airstrikes alone will resolve the conflict.

- Prime Minister Major has argued publicly that airstrikes would be insufficient to resolve the conflict given the guerrilla nature of the fighting, and senior French officials say airstrikes would endanger innocent civilians.
- The German position is more ambiguous; Foreign Minister Kinkel and Conservative German politicians and media have expressed support for such strikes, but German Defense Minister Ruehe last week expressed concern about likely Serb retaliation against UN troops.
- Turkey is pressing the Allies to seek UN authorization for air strikes to destroy heavy artillery in Bosnia. Ankara reportedly is prepared to offer air units for such operations.

The West Europeans probably would support limited airstrikes to suppress attacks on relief convoys.

More Support For Limited Missions

Most key Allied governments envision the use of force only for narrowly conceived missions such as monitoring heavy weapons, escorting aid convoys, or opening up land relief corridors.

- London is just beginning to evaluate proposals for military support of humanitarian relief efforts and monitoring of heavy weapons. British officials say they are prepared to provide a limited number of military "specialists" in support of UN humanitarian aid convoys but claim that UK ground forces are unavailable due to other commitments.
- France, with some support from Italy, has urged consideration of military means to open up land corridors for aid delivery. A French-sponsored UN mandate likely to be proposed next week calls for expansion of UNPROFOR's mandate to insure security of humanitarian aid convoys.
Paris also would consider supporting "the neutralization of heavy weapons", and would be willing to increase its efforts in personnel and material. France earlier offered to send helicopters and armored reconnaissance vehicles to Bosnia and Hercegovina to monitor heavy weapons and escort UN aid convoys.
- Bonn is concerned that even NATO planning for military contingencies in Yugoslavia will exacerbate the domestic debate over Germany's out-of-area role, but it probably is prepared to provide logistical assistance for military action in support of relief efforts. If conservative pressures for action grow--particularly if

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the conflict spreads outside of Bosnia and Hercegovina--Bonn might consider additional actions such as supplying arms to Hungary.

- The Italians reportedly are preparing 90 naval infantry troops to board and search merchant ships in case the naval monitoring mission in the Adriatic is expanded to an enforcement mission. ☐

Outlook

Domestic pressure on European governments to act will increase if, as we expect, reports of atrocities and widespread fighting continue in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Responding to this pressure, key West European governments are likely to overrule the objections of their military planners and agree to undertake limited action. If systematic atrocities are confirmed or Serbia expands the conflict to Kosovo, governments may come under pressure to support more punitive measures such as airstrikes against Serbian military installations. Public opinion in these countries, however, is likely to be fickle. Their publics almost certainly would support narrowly targeted operations with a clearly humanitarian purpose, but airstrikes or ground operations that cause significant civilian or European troop casualties probably would provoke major opposition. ☐

In any military involvement, the West Europeans would want a clearly defined UN mandate for their actions, and they would want to work through European institutions. London, Paris, and Bonn probably will pursue a CSCE political role in sanctioning military operations, and the French and Germans almost certainly would prefer to use the WEU to organize their efforts. The West Europeans--including a reluctant France--would, however, see a role for NATO if the US made a significant air or ground contribution. In any case, they will look to Washington for intelligence and logistic support and will want the US to back-stop their efforts if they encounter serious difficulties on the ground. ☐

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